



City of Seattle

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Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor  
**Department of Planning and Development**  
D. M. Sugimura, Director

**CITY OF SEATTLE  
ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR  
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Application Number:** 2403605

**Applicant Name:** David Goldberg, Mithun  
for Jim Maxwell, Woodland Park Zoo

**Address of Proposal:** 5500 Phinney Avenue North

**SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTIONS**

Master Use Permit for future construction of a one-story, 8,300 sq. ft. exhibit space, accessory to a public park (Family Science Learning Center, Woodland Park Zoo). The project involves no additional on-site parking.

The following approvals are required:

**SEPA to approve, condition or deny pursuant to [25.05.660](#) – Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) Chapter [25.05](#)**

**SEPA DETERMINATION:** ☐ Exempt ☐ DNS ☒ EIS<sup>1</sup>

☐ DNS with conditions

☐ DNS involving non-exempt grading or demolition or  
involving another agency with jurisdiction

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<sup>1</sup> On January 13, 2005, DPD published a [notice of adoption](#) of the Woodland Park Zoo Long Range Plan Final Revised Environmental Impact Statement (LRP FREIS), published July 6, 2004. A project-specific addendum was also prepared to supplement the FREIS. Both documents are available for public review at the DPD Public Resource Center.

## Project Description

The applicant proposes a one-story, 30' tall structure currently identified as the “Family Science Learning Center”, or FSLC, to be used primarily for education and recreation for visitors to the zoo. The building will house exhibits, interactive features, presentations, and educational programs. Thematically, it would focus on early childhood learning activities related to the zoo and wildlife conservation. The building program includes a 5000 sq. ft. main public exhibit space with supporting administrative and work spaces and a small animal holding facility to support the exhibit area.

## Vicinity and Site

The project is located near the West Entry of Woodland Park Zoo, in the Phinney Ridge neighborhood. The building is proposed to be located to the southeast of the Zoo’s “Rainforest Café” on the site of the 1914 [primate house](#), recently demolished under permit #[738695](#).

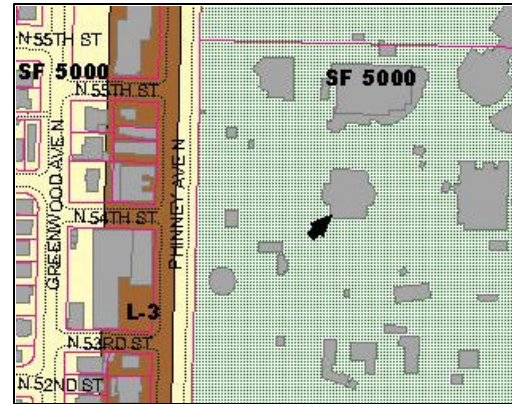
The zoo site is bounded by N. 50<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, Phinney Ave N. on the west, N. 59<sup>th</sup> Street on the north, and Aurora Avenue N. on the east. Various portions of the site are identified as Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA, Steep Slope and Wildlife Habitat).

The zoo is located on City of Seattle Parks land, in a Single Family zone with a minimum lot size of 5000 sq. ft. (SF 5000). The wider neighborhood surrounding the zoo is primarily SF 5000. To the west across Phinney Ave N is a narrow band of properties zoned residential Lowrise 3 (L3). To the south of the zoo is zoned primarily residential Lowrise 2 and 3. Aurora Avenue N. is a limited access state highway, and Woodland Park is across Aurora Ave to the east.

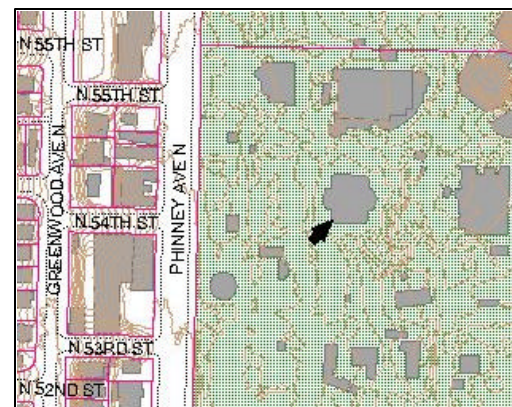
The site is served by public transit. Metro route [5](#) passes the zoo on Phinney Ave N, and route [44](#) passes nearby on N. 46<sup>th</sup> St. to the south.

## ANALYSIS – SEPA

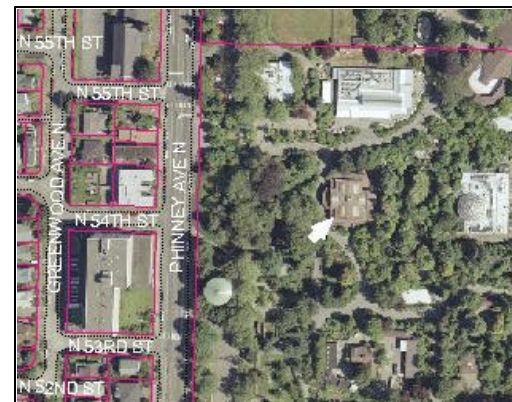
DPD requires a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) analysis for a development of more than 4000 sq. ft. of nonresidential development in a Single Family zone, according to Director’s Rule [23-2000](#) and SMC [25.05.800](#). Seattle Parks and Recreation published a Final Revised Environmental Impact Statement (FREIS) in December 2003, related to Woodland Park Zoo’s Long Range Plan (LRP 2002). The FREIS describes the current proposal as a component of the “no action alternative”, noting



**Figure 1.** Vicinity zoning



**Figure 2.** Local topography



**Figure 3.** Aerial view

that the FSLC had been considered under the Zoo's 1976 Long Range Plan by Jones & Jones.<sup>2</sup> DPD has also reviewed the record related to the City Hearing Examiner's findings and decision in the appeal by the Phinney Ridge Community Council and Michael W. Gendler from an EIS adequacy determination by the Superintendent, Department of Parks and Recreation, regarding the Woodland Park Zoo LRP 2002 (Hearing Examiner Files [W-02-001 and 002](#)). In addition to the analysis provided in the FREIS, the applicant provided the initial disclosure of this development's potential impacts in an environmental checklist signed and dated on June 11, 2004. DPD has also reviewed an addendum to the FREIS, focused on the FSLC. DPD received a letter from one neighborhood resident. This information and the experience of the lead agency in similar situations form the basis for this analysis and decision. This report anticipates short and long-term adverse impacts from the proposal.

### Short-term Impacts

The following temporary or construction-related impacts are expected: decreased air quality due to increased dust and other suspended air particulates during construction; potential soil erosion during excavation and general site work; increased runoff; tracking of mud onto adjacent streets by construction vehicles; increased demand on traffic and parking from construction equipment and personnel; conflict with normal pedestrian and vehicular movement adjacent to the site; increased noise; and consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources. Due to the temporary nature and limited scope of these impacts, they are not considered significant (SMC Section [25.05.794](#)). Although not significant, these impacts are adverse.

The SEPA Overview Policy (SMC [25.05.665 D](#)) states, "where City regulations have been adopted to address an environmental impact, it shall be presumed that such regulations are adequate to achieve sufficient mitigation", subject to limitations. Several adopted City codes and/or ordinances provide mitigation for some of the identified impacts. Specifically these are: the Stormwater, Grading and Drainage Control Code (grading, site excavation and soil erosion); Street Use Ordinance (watering streets to suppress dust, obstruction of the rights-of-way during construction); Building Code (construction standards); and Noise Ordinance (construction noise). Compliance with these codes and ordinances will be adequate to achieve sufficient mitigation of potential adverse impacts. Thus, mitigation pursuant to SEPA is not necessary for these impacts. However, more detailed discussion of some impacts is appropriate.

**Construction noise.** The limits of the construction area are about 300 feet from the nearest residential uses across Phinney Ave N. Noise associated with construction of the building will not likely adversely affect surrounding uses in the area. DPD therefore finds the Noise Ordinance to be adequate to mitigate the potential noise impacts.

**Parking.** The site abuts Phinney Ave N, categorized as a minor arterial by the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). Parking is provided on both sides of the street. The revised Final EIS includes a March 2003 parking demand study conducted by the Transpo Group. The study determines that parking demand by zoo visitors and staff currently exceeds on-site parking supply approximately 100 days every year. The study also notes that zoo visitors often park on surrounding streets even when closer on-site parking is available, and that such behavior is affected in large part by the \$3.50 fee

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<sup>2</sup> As the 1976 Plan apparently predates statewide requirements for SEPA review, the elements of that plan that are retained in the LRP 2002 are not part of the "proposal" for the EIS analyses.

assessed by the Zoo for on-site parking. Peak zoo visitation occurs primarily on weekends and during special events.

The parking analysis does not identify levels of on-street parking utilization in the Phinney Ridge neighborhood, particularly in the vicinity of the West Entry. It's reasonable to assume that this neighborhood experiences its highest levels of zoo-related on-street parking on weekends and during special events. On-site parking is often underutilized and therefore available, particularly on weekdays. As proposed, the project's construction-related parking demand is to occur entirely on weekdays. The addendum states that the project's construction-related parking is to be located on site and that it is to be provided free of charge.

The project involves staging of construction vehicles and materials to the west of the proposed FSLC. DPD determines that use of the identified area should adequately mitigate any adverse parking impacts related to construction equipment.

**Construction Vehicles.** Existing City code (SMC [11.62](#)) requires truck activities to use arterial streets to every extent possible. The subject site fronts Phinney Ave N., close to N. 50<sup>th</sup> Street, and traffic impacts resulting from the truck traffic associated with grading will be of short duration and mitigated by enforcement of SMC [11.62](#). As proposed, any impact by construction vehicles is sufficiently mitigated by enforcement of the provisions of SMC [11.62](#).

City code (SMC [11.74](#)) provides that material hauled in trucks not be spilled during transport. The City requires that a minimum of one foot of "freeboard" (area from level of material to the top of the truck container) be provided in loaded uncovered trucks which minimizes the amount of spilled material and dust from the truck bed en route to or from a site. No further conditioning of the grading/excavation element of the project is warranted pursuant to SEPA policies.

Other short-term impacts not noted here as mitigated by codes, ordinances or conditions (e.g. increased use of energy and natural resources) are not sufficiently adverse to warrant further mitigation.

**Animal impacts.** A central component of the Zoo's mission is to foster the survival of various threatened and endangered species, mostly exotic, within controlled environments. Given the Zoo's professional expertise in similar developments, construction of the Family Science Learning Center is not likely to have any adverse impact on the continued care of these animals. DPD therefore determines that no further conditioning is warranted in this regard.

#### Long-term Impacts

Long-term or use-related impacts are also anticipated from the proposal: increased bulk and scale on the site; minor increase in ambient noise due to increased human activity; loss of vegetation; and increased energy consumption.

The likely long-term impacts are typical of this scale of development, and DPD expects them to be mitigated by the City's adopted codes and/or ordinances. Specifically these are: the Land Use Code (aesthetic impacts, height, setbacks, parking); and the Seattle Energy Code (long-term energy consumption). However, more detailed discussion of some of these impacts is appropriate.

**Aesthetic impacts.** The applicant presented the project to the Seattle Design Commission on various occasions, and obtained its unanimous recommendation to approve on June 3, 2004. The Commission provided the following feedback.

[The Commission] appreciates the way in which proponents have looked closely at the recommendations that were made last time and responded to them;

- Believes that the siting of the building is appropriate in terms of location and the way in which it will fit in to the rest of the Discovery Village as it develops;
- Believes that the fundamental forming of the building makes a great deal of sense: one large flexible area with a service area behind;
- Look at ways that the service area can expand because everyone is always looking for additional storage;
- Encourages proponents to continue to think of the basic design principles that they enunciated at the start of the project and to work with their client to ensure that those principles are indeed carried through even during the value engineering stage and budget cuts;
- Encourages proponents to look closely at the role of the artist in the project in two respects:
  - One, ensure that an artist is brought on soon and is given free reign to be an integral part of the design rather than an add-on afterwards;
  - Two, encourage proponents to think about how they can integrate the exhibit design, the artist's work, and lighting in the main exhibit area.
- Is of several minds as to the green roof. Encourages proponents to look at energy conservation measures in the broadest possible terms recognizing that the green roof is just one strategy and perhaps not even the most important in terms of energy conservation and therefore maybe something that is cut in favor of something else, but we encourage you to perform a comprehensive review;
- With regard to the green roof technical details: be cautious about letting it get too deep as it may allow trees to get established and the slope does create different micro-habitats;
- Encourages proponents to think very clearly about the educational opportunities, especially the role of the green roof and other elements in terms of children's education;
- With regard to the children's door, keep it simple, don't overplay it and don't do something that might create problems for people using the building;
- Reinforces the importance of a long-term relationship between the Zoo and the consultant to ensure that the surrounding area is maintained and developed to ensure the integrity of the building in the larger context of Discovery Village;

*On that basis we unanimously approve the project.*

DPD notes that the project largely adheres to the Design Commission recommendations, and therefore determines that no further conditioning is warranted in this regard.

**Parking and traffic impacts.** Considered in the context of the zoo at large, the Family Science Learning Center is a minor component that seeks to support the Zoo's interpretive mission and enhance the overall experience of visitors to the zoo. Considered independently, it is not likely to generate an increase in zoo visitation beyond the overall trend. Should the project attract additional visitors, it is likely that the marginal increase would occur during winter months, when visitation and demand for on-site parking is at a low. DPD therefore determines that the project is not likely to generate increased visitation that would adversely affect the surrounding neighborhood.

**Animal impacts.** A central component of the Zoo's mission is to foster the survival of various threatened and endangered species, mostly exotic, within controlled environments. Operation of the Family Science Learning Center is not likely to have any adverse impact on the continued care of these animals. DPD therefore determines that no further conditioning is warranted in this regard.

**Plant impacts.** The project proposal involves removal of two existing pine trees, neither of which qualify as "exceptional" trees .

### **DECISION – SEPA**

The application is approved.

### **CONDITIONS – SEPA**

No further conditions.

Signature: (signature on file) Date: January 31, 2005  
Scott A. Ringgold, Land Use Planner  
Department of Planning and Development